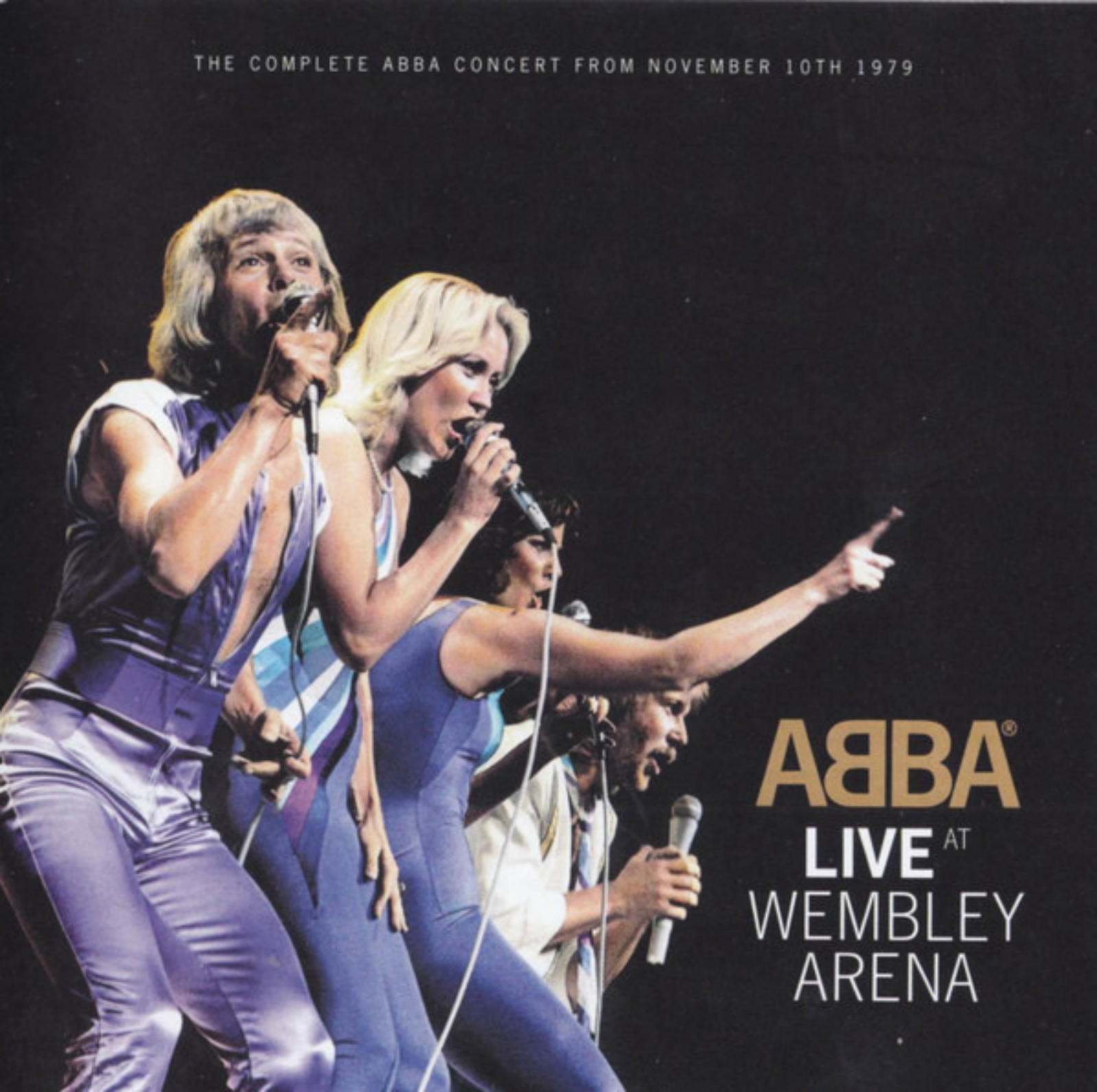
THE COMPLETE ABBA CONCERT FROM NOVEMBER 10TH 1979



ABBA®

LIVE AT WEMBLEY ARENA

ABBA WAS FAMOUS for minutely worked compositions, complex arrangements and brilliant studio productions. That same drive for perfection was in their live performances.

"ABBA wanted the best," says tour impresario Thomas Johansson. "We never talked money. The sound had to be the best, lighting the best, crew the best. The only stipulation was not to lose money. Everything was spent."

Thomas Johansson, chairman of the board of Live Nation International, is one of the most experienced and respected of tour promoters. He has worked with the biggest – Paul McCartney, Rolling Stones, Bruce Springsteen, Madonna and hundreds of others.

Johansson has known Björn Ulvaeus since way back. "We met in Västervik where my parents had a summer cottage. I was 13 and he was 16."

IN 1970, Johansson was arranging tours for Agnetha Fältskog. In 1973, he was asked to do the same for ABBA. From then on he promoted all their tours, up until the last show at the Budokan in Japan in March 1980. (The very last ABBA show in Europe was in November 1979 in Dublin.) "I was the tour promoter for all their gigs. I hired the technicians and musicians, lighting and trucks, calculated budgets and arranged shows."

ABBA played live only a very few times. In 1975 they did a lengthy tour of

ABBA

Sweden, playing rural 'folk-parks' up and down the country. They toured Europe in 1975, 1977 and 1979, toured Australia in 1977, the USA in 1979 and Japan in 1980. That was all.

ABBA knew from the start how hard it was going to be. By the time the group was formed, the four already had more than 10 years of touring behind them. Individually, they had played many hundreds of shows.

While teenagers, Agnetha and Frida sang with touring show bands at up to five shows a week. Björn and Benny were in two of the biggest and hardest working bands in Sweden – Björn was in the Hootenanny Singers and Benny in the Hep Stars. One summer, the Hootenanny Singers played 168 gigs, the Hep Stars did even more with 202 gigs – that sometimes meant four in the same day.

WHEN ABBA TOOK THE STAGE, their experience and professionalism showed. Audiences and critics were astounded that ABBA could reproduce their studio sound live – and sometimes it swung even more. The backing musicians were Sweden's best and most experienced.

"Backstage support was equally as strong," says Thomas Johansson. "Who was the world's best keyboard technician? When Benny heard it was Stuart MacKillop, who had worked with Genesis, Benny wanted him. Who did the best lighting in the world? Jimmy Barnett, who worked with Queen, and Patrick Woodroffe

who still works with The Stones. For the sound, we recruited Keith Bradley, today Elton John's manager. Brian Croft, in charge of stage design, was also ex-Stones."

Most major 1970s acts toured with a coach and a truck. Queen and the Rolling Stones upped that to three, four or five trucks. ABBA was in the same bracket, with four.

IN AUSTRALIA IN 1977, ABBA's audiences were up to 60,000. The shows were the biggest individual shows any group had done. "At that time, ABBA, the Stones and Paul McCartney were the big live acts. Nobody else pulled in more people," says Thomas Johansson. "And like Zeppelin and The Beatles, ABBA stopped playing live when they were at their absolute peak."

ABBA already had a special relationship with London. When they were due to play the Royal Albert Hall in 1977, two shows were scheduled. Expecting pressure for tickets, an ad blitz announced a ticket raffle. You could enter with a coupon torn from a newspaper. A million coupons were sent in.

When ABBA returned in 1979 they booked Wembley Arena for six shows. The tickets were gone in a flash. The group could have played Wembley for weeks. ABBA were in London just over a week, staying at the Montcalm Hotel. A tough schedule meant they needed calm time between shows. ABBA had always toured with kith and kin – family, relations and friends. It had to be as much like home as

possible. The only drama came when Frida caught a sore throat and spent a whole day at the doctor's in Harley Street.

LONDON'S TOP MUSOS paid their respects backstage. At one show alone, the following were there: Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin, Justin Hayward of the Moody Blues, Joe Strummer of The Clash and Ian Dury of The Blockheads. They sat together to the right of the stage. ABBA had secret admirers even among punk bands.

Swedish TV filmed the 1979 Wembley shows for a concert program. At Wembley, Agnetha performed her own song, "I'm Still Alive", never included in any album. This is the first-ever release on record.

***Jan Gradvall**, Stockholm 2014*

MUSIC AND LYRICS by Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus. Except: Knowing Me, Knowing You, SOS, Fernando, The Name Of The Game, Dancing Queen, Waterloo by Benny Andersson, Stig Anderson and Björn Ulvaeus. I'm Still Alive, music by Agnetha Fältskog, lyrics by Björn Ulvaeus. Gammal Fäbodpsalm Trad. Arranged by Benny Andersson.

All songs published by Universal/Union Songs AB except Chiquitita published by Music for Unicef.

Concert sound by Michael B. Tretow. Sound engineer: Claes af Geijerstam. Musicians: Ola Brunkert, drums. Anders Eljas, keyboards. Rutger Gunnarsson, bass. Mats Ronander, guitars. Åke Sundqvist, percussion. Lasse Wellander, guitars. Backup vocals: Tomas Ledin, Birgitta Wollgård, Liza Öhman.

This album produced by Ludvig Andersson. Mixed by Bernard Löhr at Mono Music Studio, Stockholm. Assistant engineering by Filip Lindholm. Mastered by Björn Engelmann, Cutting Room Stockholm. Liner notes by Jan Gradvall. Art direction: Fredrik Hurtig, Infinestyle. Cover photos by Anders Hanser © Premium Rockshot. Front cover photo colorized by Isabelle Alsén. Other photos by Anders Hanser © Premium Rockshot and Torbjörn Calvero.

Project coordinator: Mia Segolsson with thanks to Peter Mannio.

FOR MORE INFORMATION about ABBA, visit the official website: www.abbasite.com. The Official ABBA Fan Club, PO Box 3079, 4700 GB Roosendaal, The Netherlands

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